

Time for a new Noah's Ark

Britain's flora and fauna need special attention to cope with climate change, says **Chris Huhne**



Chris Huhne is Liberal Democrat environment spokesman

The evidence of climate change is now irrefutable. Many of its effects are well-known: rising sea levels and more extreme weather events, including droughts and floods. What is less well known is the dramatic effect that relatively small changes in temperature are having on the diversity of our planet. Many species of plants and animals could become extinct within decades.

We are talking here about extinctions on a devastating scale. Indeed, the literature is increasingly referring to the sixth major extinction event in the history of the natural world. Moreover, it is the first that will have been driven overwhelmingly by the impact of humankind. And we have done it unthinkingly, without foresight or analysis.

To prevent such catastrophic effects, we need to work urgently to stick to the European Union's limit of two degrees global temperature rise when compared to pre-industrial levels. And we must tell the Bush administration that this is a figure on which we cannot and should not compromise: the time for ignoring the alarm calls from the scientific community has gone.

The public debate needs to shift from rhetoric to action. The government should be doing much, much more. On the key issues of transport and energy efficiency, only the Liberal Democrats have offered detailed solutions that begin to take the measure of the cuts in carbon emissions that we need. Our green tax switch would green transport by encouraging

the use of more fuel-efficient cars and planes, while our WarmHomes package would promote, aid and reward going green in the home.

The beech is already dying back in southern England due to drought conditions, and we need to help other species to adapt. Natural river valleys can act as conduits for species, particularly in creating ways for animals to migrate north without being encumbered by humanity. The government needs to work with environmental groups to identify wildlife-rich places and how to connect them.

How much more evidence do we really need before we realise that we need to act with unprecedented speed in response to an unprecedented climatic and planetary emergency? ■

Unnaturally bred killers

The focus of the Dangerous Dogs Act on breeds rather than deeds is wrong, says **Eric Martlew**



Eric Martlew is a Labour MP and chairman of the all-party group on animal welfare

As chairman of the APG for animal welfare, I get lots of disturbing letters about animals in distress, and about the awful things humans do to animals. At first sight, it looks like the issue of dangerous dogs is the opposite of this; a case where the focus is on how animals have the potential to harm humans. But this is over-simplistic. In actual fact, the issue of dangerous dogs is about what we do to animals – it's about how we train our dogs and how we care for them – and it's about how we legislate to make sure they don't hurt either humans or other dogs.

The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 has caused serious concern to the animal welfare groups I work with for many years. Because the Act defines offences

in terms of specific breeds, it has refocused effort from 'dangerous behaviour' to the very difficult task of identifying different breed-types of dogs.

Welfare groups believe, however, that it is 'deed, not breed' that should be punished, and I'm inclined to agree with them. We know that all dogs have the potential to be dangerous. We therefore need to make sure that legislation places emphasis on the owner's responsibility not to encourage intimidating or aggressive behaviour in their animals.

There is also a real problem with the enforcement of the current legislation. This is often due to the difficulties involved in identifying the breeds of dogs seized under Section 1 of the 1991 Act.

These complexities can lead to costly and prolonged cases and can mean that dogs are kept in kennels for years whilst a legal debate goes on about whether the dog is of a prohibited type or not.

Another problem is that the 1991 Act does not cover private land, and although the other major piece of legislation relating to dangerous dogs, the Dogs Act 1871, provides for private property, it doesn't address especially dangerous incidents. This is a serious flaw, as many incidents with dangerous dogs take place in private homes or on private property.

I believe that the Dangerous Dogs Act needs some careful consideration and, in the long term, there's a need for further legislation to address its problems. ■